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**Tradition, Continuity, Legacy:**  
**The Role of Doctoral Programs**  
**In Social Work Education and the Profession**

Rena Harold, Ph.D., A.C.S.W.  
Professor and Coordinator of Graduate Programs  
School of Social Work  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan

**Introduction**

Considering the political and social crises facing the world today, the question, what is the role of doctoral programs in social work, may not seem too critical. But social work has a long tradition of helping to create answers in a world that is filled with both promise and problems. And we are all here today to celebrate the accomplishments of doctoral education, by way of honoring recent doctoral graduates of social work programs whose dissertations were thought worthy of special recognition, and whose work will add to the growing body of social work knowledge.

In speaking about the future of doctoral social work education, Reisch wrote, “As history and contemporary scholarship attest, the process of knowledge generation and problem resolution begins with the critical step of posing the right questions” (2002, p. 69). Thus, I am here today to ask you “What is the role of doctoral programs in social work education and the profession?”

## The Question

Finding a meaningful answer to this question should precede the debate about what quality doctoral education in social work should look like, what curricula should be required, what faculty should be involved in teaching in doctoral programs, what roles we want students to be able to assume upon completion of the doctorate, and which students we should be recruiting for this experience. In the same way that we teach students to decide on the purpose of a group before deciding who the members will be, what the sessions will be like, and whether to have a co-leader, or, when we as faculty create a mission statement for a social work program from which the curriculum should flow, we must begin our discussions of doctoral education in social work by looking at the role for doctoral programs today.

This question is also timely, as GADE (the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education) is currently revising its *Guidelines for Quality in Social Work Doctoral Programs* (Anastas, Crook, Doeck, Harold, Ross-Sheriff, Tucker, & Wilson, 2003), and in the past year, *Areté*, the Journal of the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina, devoted a special edition to “Contemporary Issues in Doctoral Education” including such topics as guidelines for promoting diversity, training quality teachers, research training, and recruiting students (Thyer & Wilson, 2001a).

## The Context

As you know, the profession of social work in the United States is young in the history of the world. Most social welfare historians trace its roots back to the late 1800s and early 1900s to the work of such pioneers as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond (Germain & Hartman, 1980). In fact, it was Richmond’s paper presented to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections that resulted in the establishment of the first professional training program. This program began in New York City in 1898, through the sponsorship of the Charity Organization Society (COS), and was called the New York School of Philanthropy, later the New York School of Social Work. The COS announced in the *New York Times* that it was offering a summer course with a tuition of \$10! Known for its “scientific charity programs,” the COS, under Richmond’s leadership, wanted to collect scientific data on society’s ills, form hypotheses about how to intervene, and see what worked (“Legacies,” 2001). Mary Richmond, with no college degree, let alone a doctorate, taught there about this method. Years later, this program affiliated with Columbia University, which considers itself the oldest School of Social Work in the United States (Columbia, n.d.).

The first doctorate in social work was awarded 22 years later at Bryn Mawr. According to their materials, the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work was also among the first doctoral programs in social work to offer formal instruction in clinical research (Bryn Mawr, 2002). The initiation of doctoral degree programs came at a time when professional schools within universities were gaining academic recognition. Walsh, Regan, and Valentine (1991) report that at this time, there was a growing need for educators and individuals with research skills who could contribute to theory

development and knowledge construction in social work. Indeed, as Reisch (2002) suggests, historically, doctoral programs have made significant contributions to the development of social welfare in the United States by shaping the “meaning and character” of social services, influencing public attitudes about social work, and producing social work leaders and scholars.

Consider this, then. We begin in Jane Addams’ and Mary Richmond’s time with groups of people wanting to “do good.” There was no training required. They wanted to help other people, and found models that they thought would work. Then, as in Addams’ Hull House story, she invited others to join her in her endeavors, and she and her colleagues fulfilled a need and had a positive impact on their community – one that was widely acknowledged and is still revered today. She served as a mentor for her co-workers, and in modeling the appropriate ethics and behaviors, she offered them an apprenticeship of sorts, not unlike that which medical doctors had used early on to train for their profession. But then, as the social work profession began to evolve in the context of a changing society with wave after wave of new immigrants, unionization, industrial changes, and the growth of the education enterprise, it was no longer enough to just want to help. Mary Richmond and her followers called for us to systematize our body of knowledge, to write it down, and to require training. Her classic work, *Social Diagnosis* (1917), begins this way:

Though the social worker has won a degree of recognition as being engaged in an occupation useful to the community, he is handicapped by the fact that his public is not alive to the difference between going through the motions of doing things and actually getting them done. “Doing good” was the old phrase for social service. It begged the question, as do also the newer terms, “social service” and “social work” – unless society is really served. We should welcome, therefore, the evident desire of social workers to abandon claims to respect based upon good intentions alone; we should meet halfway their earnest endeavors to subject the processes of their task to critical analysis; and should encourage them to measure their work by the best standards supplied by experience – standards which, imperfect now, are being advanced to a point where they can be called professional (p. 25).

And so, Richmond and her followers built on a “tradition” of “doing good” to create “continuity” and generate new and scientific knowledge, and then passed on this new knowledge as a legacy for future generations of social workers. This is a model we will consider again in our discussion of the role of doctoral programs. Mary Richmond, with no formal higher education, was one of the first professors of social work. She taught from experience, and created a curriculum for others who followed her.

I will not dwell, here, on the history of the establishment of the MSW degree or the introduction of the BSW that came after that, but it is important to note that even though the first social work doctorate was granted in 1920, subsequent growth, in terms of numbers of doctoral programs in social work, was slow. Most Schools of Social Work, even through the 1980s, had a large number of faculty who had their MSW degree, but no doctorate, and came into the academy after years of practice in the field. This followed the model of many professions that depended on practitioners to train future

practitioners. In addition, in 1948, there were only five schools that had doctoral programs, 10 in 1957, 33 in 1976, 47 in 1990, and 72 in 2003 (Thyer & Arnold, 2003; Walsh et al., 1991).

The 1990s, however, saw a rapid rise in numbers of programs. This increase occurred in the context of most universities requiring more research, publications, and grant-funded projects, as well as requiring the completion of a doctorate for most tenure-line positions. In addition, many professions, including social work and medicine, had been discussing and training practitioners for empirical practice. It was no longer enough to have practitioners passing on “practice wisdom,” or to evaluate the outcome of their work by their “gut feeling” about how the client was progressing. The assumption was that additional training at the doctoral level, would produce social work faculty who had the necessary knowledge to train the future practitioner-researcher. There was also a felt need to teach people how to teach, a task that could be accomplished through coursework and experience during a doctoral program (Tirrito & Ginsberg, 2001). Lastly, having a doctoral program was also seen as prestigious, a mark that a School had a good research program, a strong curriculum, was capable of contributing to the knowledge base of the profession, could recruit the best and brightest of students and faculty, and in a competitive market, was worthy of a higher ranking (Khinduka, 2001; Levine, 1997).

Today, there are 78 members of GADE (GADE, 2002). On the face of it, the tremendous increase in programs fits with the critical shortage of Ph.D.-educated faculty for Schools of Social Work around the country (Khinduka, 2001; Thyer & Wilson, 2001b; Tirrito & Ginsburg, 2001). However, doctoral admissions and graduations have not kept up with this need – that is, the numbers of students applying to and being accepted into social work doctoral programs has not risen proportionally, and thus we have more programs vying for a similar pool of students. In 1988, with approximately 47 social work doctoral programs, 235 degrees were granted, a mathematical average of 5 per program. Today, that average has not increased, but rather with approximately 300 social work doctoral graduates (Thyer & Wilson, 2001b), the average has dropped to about 4 per program, per year. In addition, the number of graduates of color has decreased from 25% in 1990 to 14% in 1998 (Thyer & Wilson, 2001b).

Of those 300 doctoral graduates, about one-third to one-half (Kinduka, 2001) choose a career in academia. Thyer and Wilson (2001b) estimate that per doctoral graduate, there are three to four faculty vacancies in our 453 CSWE-accredited BSW programs and 158 MSW programs (CSWE cite). This is a “good news” story for our doctoral students, and certainly a recruiting statistic for those of us who coordinate doctoral programs. However, it presents a major dilemma for the profession as a whole, and for the enterprise of social work education, in particular. It brings us back to the question of what we see as the role of doctoral programs in social work.

## **The Answer from One Sample**

In thinking about this question, I decided, as any good researcher does, to seek out data! I did this by way of an informal qualitative study. In this case, I used a “convenience sample” and e-mailed the current doctoral students and doctoral alumni/ae

from my own School, and asked them this question: what is the role of doctoral programs in social work education and the profession? The response rate was less than stellar, but I want to acknowledge those who replied with very interesting responses that helped me move my own thinking along. The responses fell into the three themes that I have used in the title, and in my discussion of Mary Richmond's role in the creation of the social work education enterprise: tradition, continuity, and legacy.

Tradition. One respondent talked about the role that a doctoral program must play in terms of being a depository of the history and essential social work knowledge, a place that safeguards them and teaches them, and *aligns itself with the six core social work values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, competence.* In a similar vein, a respondent wrote that doctoral programs should *give a louder voice to advocacy, social justice, research, practice, social work education, the 'body' of knowledge, and social service delivery,* and, said a third person, *remember the historic commitment to vulnerable populations.* That is, doctoral programs have the responsibility to preserve and publish what is known and held as critical within the social work profession, and the advanced training in this area *heightens the ability to integrate this into practice.*

Continuity. A second theme was discussed by several of the respondents, i.e., the overarching role of doctoral education to create new knowledge in a variety of ways and contexts: *Doctoral programs have the role and responsibility to begin to frame the context, dialogue, and critical thinking about the relationship social work as a profession has...around determining service delivery and policy formation.* Doctoral programs, wrote another respondent, should *broaden the depth, breadth, and grasp of one's knowledge of that which functions to shape social work practice and thought.* They should, said a respondent, *build skills and confidence to translate practice knowledge into scholarship for consumption by larger audiences, to enter the discourse on a topic perhaps with other disciplines thereby influencing their understanding of phenomena.*

*Science to practice* was a theme that was discussed as part of the idea of knowledge generation. One respondent wrote that with an increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice and best practices, social work doctoral programs provide the place where an *active relationship and partnership between academic institutions (the place of science) and the field (the place of practice) can be forged.* A respondent who is currently an administrator of a large state agency wrote that it is *important to have Ph.D.-trained staff because they are familiar with university systems, research, and analyses of practice models.* Further, as contemporary public policy has become more complex, doctoral programs are preparing social workers to look at *the interrelationship between policies and the venues in which they are carried out, as well as focusing on analyzing and managing policy, in addition to formulating and implementing policy.*

Legacy. One response provided the link between the creation of knowledge and the task of passing it on by writing: *Doctoral programs provide necessary research skills and a knowledge base for the continued growth that will sustain the profession. They continue the tradition of excellence by providing scholarly research, publications, and quality teaching.* Another response in this vein stated that providing "instructional leadership" is a critical role for doctoral programs: *one of the key learning experiences of the doctoral program is the development of competencies to teach - the ability to*

*research, assemble, and deliver information in a manner that is adjusted to meet the needs of diverse audiences.*

The legacy, then, wrote one respondent is that Doctoral programs should shape both the profession and social work education. They should teach students to think critically, write, give effective oral presentations, use technology, write grants. These skills will lead to the enhancement of the image of the profession and the ability to serve clients.

## **The Answer from Other Sources**

Continuing with my data gathering, I turned to the literature for the responses I could find there. There was a general sense that doctoral training in social work would lead to the development of research knowledge regarding social problems, and the placement of skilled personnel in high-ranking policy and practice positions (Jenson, Fraser, & Lewis, 1991), and that the expansion of doctoral education would lead to the renewal of intellectual leadership in academic and professional social work (Yelaja, 1991).

The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2002) said that doctoral education prepares “stewards of the discipline.” As such, they state that the purpose of Doctoral Programs is to “educate and prepare those to whom we can entrust the vigor, quality, and integrity of the field” (Carnegie, 2002, p.1). Further, the role of doctoral programs is to conserve the history and foundational ideas of the field/discipline/profession, i.e., the tradition; generate new knowledge, i.e., continuity, and transform the understandings from tradition and continuity, by representing and communicating ideas through writing, teaching, and application, i.e., legacy, as suggested by the model in Figure 1.

## The Roles of Doctoral Programs: A Model

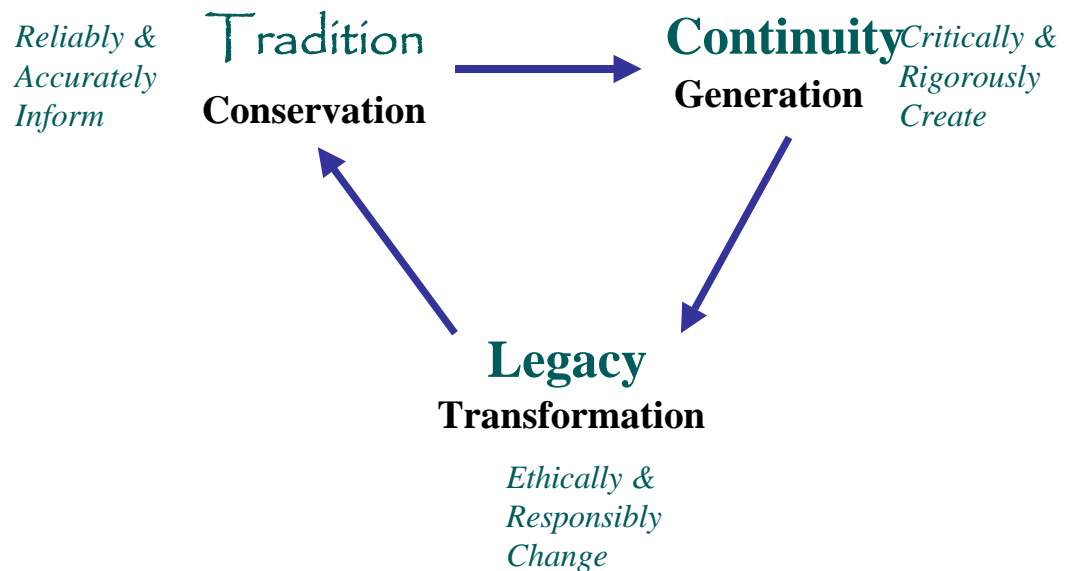


Figure 1. A model of the roles that doctoral programs play in social work education and the profession, indicating the directional flow of the process by which the component parts influence each other.

### The Model as a Whole

I contend that this model begins with “tradition,” but that it is a continuous loop because as knowledge is generated and transformed, it becomes tradition. This is what we saw with the example of Mary Richmond and her colleagues, and we continue today to build upon already established traditions as we keep on creating and leaving new ones. How do we generate each of these pieces, and what is the role of doctoral programs in this process? I want to begin by looking at and defining each of these terms.

### The Parts of the Model

“Tradition” is defined as “the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, from generation to generation, a long established way of thinking or acting, a continuing pattern of culture, beliefs, or practices” (Random House, 1998, p. 2006). “Continuity” refers to a “continuous or connected whole” (Random House, 1998, p. 440) or an “unbroken succession” (Oxford, 1999, p. 205); whereas “legacy” means

“anything handed down from the past, as from an ancestor or predecessor” (Random House, 1998, p. 1098). But each of these terms has multiple synonyms.

The word “tradition” has been associated with the following words or phrases: custom, common practice, archive, guidelines, history, chronicle, documentation, and time-honored practice. Certainly, some of the “history” of our profession is “chronicled” in the Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. Indeed, most doctoral programs offer course work on the history of social work and social welfare as part of their curricula in order to conserve and build upon the past, as well as courses on ethics and epistemology to root students in our core values and knowledge base.

“Continuity” has been used to mean: retained, linked, uninterrupted, procession, progression, long lasting, durable, and successive. I think of it here in these ways, but also in the sense that we want to generate knowledge in order to build upon our tradition, and to “retain” a “progression” of knowledge, values, ethics, skills – the cornerstones of the social work profession. Doctoral curricula pay special attention to this phase in their courses on knowledge construction and research.

Finally, the word, “legacy” has been associated with bequest, impact, spin-off, beneficiary, heirloom, transferred, after-effect, and by-product. The idea of transformation is an is the notion that in order to continue to create new tradition, we must use what we have created, change it as needed, and “transfer” it to the next generation. Certainly programs that emphasize pedagogy are ones that are committed to the notion of “legacy,” as are those that require students to do research internships, present at conferences, and/or submit papers for publication. In fact, the whole dissertation process is an exercise in knowledge generation and transformation.

With each of these terms, we must be aware of the way in which we engage in the activities that go with them. We must reliably and accurately inform in conserving tradition. We must critically and rigorously create in generating continuity, and we must ethically and responsibly change in promoting transformation and creating a legacy. As with all systemic, dynamic models, there is also the notion that

- each of the pieces of the model impacts on the others – each exists within the context of the whole
- a change in one part of the model creates a change in another – the pieces of the model are interdependent
- there is a need for input, some form of energy from the external environment – an ecosystemic approach to education that draws from multiple sources
- there is a need production of output, which becomes input for other systems – building on one piece of the model to create the next one
- there must be feedback from the environment - evaluation

I would contend, that a critical role for doctoral programs in social work is to keep this model alive – to pay attention to all three components. Do some people in our profession think that one area is more important than another? And if so, does this explain the foci that different doctoral programs adopt?



### Creating and nurturing the pieces of the model

In a recent talk on the future of doctoral social work education, David Tucker (2002), said that there were three independent but interrelated concepts of social work:

1. a practical activity, reflected in the notion of the “helping profession,”
2. a discipline that is worthy of scientific study, and
3. a research tradition that emphasizes knowledge construction through empirical and theoretical work, as well as the development of an infrastructure for the support, adjudication, and dissemination of that work.

Although many (Tucker, 2002) believe that the primary concern of doctoral education lies with the latter two concepts, approximately 15% of social work doctoral programs offer a clinical doctorate and would identify the first concept as equally important. All doctoral programs, however, seek to respond to the dual concerns of the academy and the field in building on social work history and creating scholar-practitioners and/or scholar-educators who will make significant contributions to social work education, social service agencies, policy think tanks, as well as to the scientific and professional literature (Tucker, 2002; Walsh et al. 1991).

In a recent editorial comment, Naomi Farber (2001) remarked upon the gravity of our responsibility as we provide doctoral students with a rigorous educational experience that will train them for intellectual pursuit within the practical and ethical demands of our profession. She wrote: “...we, as scholars in an applied profession, are responsible for generating much of the knowledge that informs practice and evaluation of the impact of that practice. However, as educators in professional schools, we are also responsible for preparing the teachers of social work practitioners: that is, we are, in the end, responsible to the clients whose social workers are taught by our doctoral students and graduates” (p.1).

A distinguished national group with a focus on higher education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, formed a group to discuss doctoral education, and titled it the “Responsive Ph.D. Initiative,” (Woodrow Wilson, 2002). This initiative called for “new paradigms,” with an emphasis on interdisciplinary work, “new practices,” a call to teach doctoral students about pedagogy as well as research, and “new people,” a push to recruit and retain a more diverse pool of doctoral students (Khinduka, 2001).

Each of these initiatives fits neatly within our model. The social work knowledge base, historically, has grown out of the research of the social sciences, most specifically, sociology, psychology, political science, anthropology, and economics. We have adapted and used concepts and methodologies from other disciplines and social work now contributes to this knowledge base as a more equal partner. In fact, most doctoral programs in social work consider themselves interdisciplinary, if not in title, then in nature, requiring students to take cognate courses from other areas in the university. Thus, for social work, interdisciplinary knowledge generation comes naturally, built on our tradition. And it is critical that this occur because as Khinduka (2001) has pointed out, “Creative solutions to perplexing problems lie at the intersections of disciplines” (p.6).

Tirrito and Ginsburg (2001) have called for doctoral programs to provide their

students with “quality instruction in delivering quality teaching” (p. 29). They point to the need to train educators who will be fair, accessible, use a variety of teaching methods, as well as knowledgeable in their subject areas. As noted above, it is not only our students who will benefit from good teaching, but also the clients whom they serve. Our ability to train scholar-educators at the doctoral level who can effectively transfer information, while modeling appropriate professional skills and ethics to our BSW and MSW students, is part of the legacy that doctoral programs can pass on.

Similarly, to successfully impact all three parts of the model, social work doctoral programs must recruit and educate more persons of color. Schiele and Wilson wrote (2001) that the selection of scholarly topics often reflects life experiences, and thus, the recruitment and retention of diverse doctoral students, who then enter the academy, will help to culturally diversify the social work knowledge base. This also will ensure that curricula pay attention to the perspective of historically oppressed groups (Schiele & Wilson, 2001). Further, since many doctoral programs have a number of international students, doctoral programs can lead the way for Schools of Social Work and the profession to articulate and research issues associated with globalization (Reisch, 2002).

The role of doctoral programs, then, is to support the flow and process of the model. We must create input from within the profession and across disciplines to keep the system alive, find people who will diversify the generation of knowledge and transform the future of the profession, and evaluate the input to make sure that we are building new traditions upon which the cycle will continue. These goals will ensure the growth and vitality of the social work profession, in part by ensuring the vitality of social work education. The draft of the new GADE guidelines reads (Anastas et al., 2003):

Doctoral education occupies a particularly critical place in the overall structure of social work education because it is the training ground for almost all those who become faculty members and who both build and disseminate the profession’s knowledge base. What social work does not accomplish through doctoral education has major implications for every level of professional practice, since it affects teaching and education at the bachelor’s and master’s levels as well as at the doctoral level....Able, committed, motivated, and well-trained doctoral students, both as students and later as educators and scholars, make a critical contribution to the profession’s ability to generate ideas and to educate new generations of students and professionals (p. 5).

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